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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 FREETOWN 000081

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER/ESPRUILL)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [SL](#)  
SUBJECT: FEBRUARY POLITICAL ROUND-UP - FREETOWN

REF: A. FREETOWN 48  
[1](#)B. FREETOWN 61  
[1](#)C. FREETOWN 65  
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[1](#)E. FREETOWN 79

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1/4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador met with President Koroma February 27 and elicited a positive response in a pending request to expel wanted criminals and needed informants to the United States. Koroma reshuffled the cabinet after months of rumors, creating some controversy but largely satisfying Sierra Leoneans who appear to value action and change regardless of the type or consequence. The debate over FGM reached a crescendo when four female journalists were abducted by members of a secret society for allegedly criticizing the practice on-air. The Special Court for Sierra Leone issued a judgment in the RUF case, and also hosted a visit from the Management Committee. Diplomatic ties with countries in Asia, Europe, and South America have increased and Sierra Leone continues to enjoy donor support from Japan, Germany and Italy. End Summary.

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AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH PRESIDENT KOROMA  
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[1](#)2. (C) On February 27, Ambassador Perry met with President Koroma to discuss pending bilateral issues and the new administration's policy priorities (reftel D). The conversation substantively covered: economic aid; security and defense issues; human rights; the potential return of Peace Corps volunteers; the still-unsigned Status of Forces Agreement; and the pending request to expel three individuals to the U.S. Koroma was a cordial host, amenable to discussion on all topics, but only made concrete promises in relation to honoring the expulsion requests. This is a significant development, since post has been waiting for a final decision on this issue from the Sierra Leonean government for six months. Koroma also indicated that this is a prescient time to go after other Sierra Leoneans involved in the narcotics trade (reftel C).

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KOROMA FINALLY RESHUFFLES THE CABINET  
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[1](#)3. (C) After months of speculation, Koroma reshuffled his Cabinet on February 27, firing five ministers outright, moving underperformers to less prestigious positions, and rewarding his cronies (reftel E). The Foreign Minister, Attorney General, and Minister of Defense are among the notable few who kept their posts, while friends of the President assumed the roles of Minister of Mineral Resources, Energy and Water Resources, and Finance. The reshuffle has angered some members of civil society, because it decreased the number of women in the Cabinet from three to two, while others have criticized what they perceive to be increased

regionalism benefiting Koroma's home area in the north. The PMDC party, which aligned with the APC for the 2007 Presidential run-off in return for Cabinet positions, saw their ministerial representation drop from five posts to two; their threats to resign from their Cabinet posts in protest have yet to be carried out. The opinion of the general public is that the reshuffle proves Koroma is a strong, action-oriented leader. Comment: In reftel, post questioned why corrupt ministers, such as David Carew and Haja Afsatu Kabba, remained in Cabinet positions. The latest hypothesis is that Koroma wanted to prove to the international community that most of his initial selections were good ones, but that their talents were being underutilized in their positions. By transferring these individuals, including his friends Carew and Kabba, he believes he is demonstrating that his original judgments were sound. End comment.

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FEMALE JOURNALISTS ATTACKED BY FGM PRACTITIONERS  
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14. (C) On February 7, four female journalists in Kenema were captured by Soweis (traditional FGM practitioners) and other members of the Bondo secret society for allegedly attacking the practice of FGM on radio (reftel A). The Women's Leader in Kenema and head of the Bondo Society, Haja Massah Kaisamba, said the journalists were taken into custody because of their unfavorable public statements, vowing they would not allow anyone to speak out against FGM. The journalists have all denied any wrongdoing, claiming that they did not participate in radio campaigns. One of the journalists reported that she was stripped naked in the bush

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and was later paraded on the streets of Kenema before being set free. This action was condemned by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalist (SLAJ) in a press release and the incident sparked a huge debate on FGM across the country. Comment: FGM continues to be a very sensitive subject in Sierra Leone, and the government has failed to date to take a definitive stand against the practice. Ambassador told the President on February 27 that FGM, as a gender equality issue, will factor heavily into future decisions related to eligibility for MCC or similar entities. Koroma responded that the government will continue to fund public awareness campaigns, and added that security forces were instrumental in securing the journalist's release. End comment.

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SPECIAL COURT RUF JUDGMENT AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
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15. (U) The Special Court for Sierra Leone issued a judgment against the three defendants in the RUF case (reftel B) on February 25. Two of the three were found guilty of 16 of 18 charges, while the remaining individual was found guilty of 14 of 18 charges. The judgment marks the end of the trials sitting in Freetown, with only the Taylor trial in The Hague remaining. Sentencing for the convicted RUF defendants will likely take place in March, and an appeals process is expected to follow.

16. (U) The Management Committee for the Special Court made their annual visit to Freetown February 17 - 20. The Committee met with Court staff, and also paid a brief courtesy call on President Koroma. Legacy and residual issues were discussed, as was the importance of adhering to the completion strategy and timeline. The two U.S. representatives making the trip, Brendan Doherty from S/WCI and Mark Simonoff from USUN, reported to the Ambassador that the budget situation at the Court is dire, and that funding to ensure that its mandate can be met is desperately needed (Note: Post has requested Department's thoughts on funding mechanisms. End note). Further, funding for legacy projects and, possibly, residual mechanisms is also being sought.

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SIX ENVOYS PRESENT CREDENTIALS TO PRESIDENT KOROMA  
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¶17. (U) President Koroma received letters of credence on February 24 from Miguel Perez Cruz of Cuba, Miroslav Kremek of the Czech Republic and Saad Almutaizi from Palestine. On February 27 President Koroma received three more letters of credence from the Ambassadors of Denmark, Israel and Switzerland. The Danish Ambassador is Stig Barlyng, the Israeli Ambassador is Giden Beharand, and the Swiss Ambassador is Dominik Langenbacher. Comment: None of the countries have an in-country diplomatic presence. End comment. (Note: UN/ERSG Michael van der Schulenburg also presented credentials on February 28. End note).

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BILATERAL RELATIONS  
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¶18. (U) The Ministry of Health and Sanitation, in collaboration with UNICEF, received a USD 2.9 million grant from the government of Japan. The Japanese Ambassador, Mr. Kelichi Katakami signed on behalf of the Japanese government, and stated that the grant will be used to enhance the capacity of the Ministry of Health, District Health Teams, and NGOs to deliver cost-effective interventions that will reduce mortality rates among children under five and pregnant women nation-wide.

¶19. (U) The government of Japan also provided a grant of USD 87,299 to the Rokupr Agricultural Research Center to facilitate rehabilitation work at the Rice Research Station. Rokupr Rice Research Station is one of the oldest such institutions in West Africa.

¶10. (U) The German Ambassador to Sierra Leone, Rolf Saligmann, donated ten new XL bikes and handed over keys for the newly rehabilitated quarters at the Ross Road Police Barracks to the Inspector General of Police. At the handing-over ceremony, Saligmann said that this fulfills the promise made by the German Embassy to the UN to support law enforcement and provide assistance beyond their traditional development cooperation. A GTZ representative said that strengthening the capacities of police forces in African countries is a new priority of the German government, and outlined completed projects like the rehabilitation of the Hastings Police Training School, and construction of a police station with accommodation in Potoru.

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¶11. (U) The visiting Italian Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini, disclosed his government's plans to support the second phase of the Bumbuna hydro-electric project. He made this disclosure during a courtesy call on the Vice President on February 12. Frattini said they are ready to fund the project, which would provide 200 additional megawatts to the Makeni-Freetown corridor, and that he and his entourage came to Sierra Leone to inspect other Government of Italy-funded projects. Frattini stated that the Italian government has interests in agriculture, infrastructure, health, and security and also plans to help train the Sierra Leone Police on combating drug trafficking and other illicit practices. Comment: The Bumbuna Dam is being constructed by an Italian company. End comment.

PERRY